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THE SETTING OF A COLLEGE ADMISSION PAPER IN ENGLISH.

WITH PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATIONS.

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DOUBTLESS to the minds of many of you, as you read the subject of the morning and saw who was first to speak upon the theme, there occurred the old Latin proverb, *Sutor, ne ultra crepidam*. It may well seem presumptuous for a teacher in a secondary school to treat of the setting of a college admission paper. It is his province to prepare pupils to answer such questions as the college may set. Should he also suggest to the college the questions to be set in order to enable his pupils to pass?

To these objections I may reply that the topic is not one of my own choosing. When I was requested to address this meeting, my subject was assigned. At first I hesitated, for it seemed to me that a paper on such a theme ought to come from a college representative. Then I remembered an incident that decided me to accept:

Not very long since about half a score of us, in the vicinity of Boston, who send boys yearly to the Harvard examinations in English, invited one of the chief men in the English department of the University to meet us in a friendly discussion. The conference was very satisfying; we found that college and school were striving for the same end, and that each side was glad to view the situation from the standpoint of the other. The teachers submitted certain specimens of questions that they believed could be asked with profit; and they were pleased and surprised, when the next Harvard examination papers appeared, to discover some of their suggested questions, inserted almost *verbatim*.

No college wishes to exclude candidates fitted to profit by its courses, any more than the self-respecting teacher wishes to smuggle into college his unfitted pupils. School and college

are allies, and what interests or affects one, interests or affects the other. The very name of this association indicates that we may, without prejudice, pass over the boundary line and discuss matters in our neighboring provinces for mutual improvement and enlightenment.

If, then, we wish to know concerning a student's ability to enter upon college training in English with profit, and if we determine to decide this matter by the medium of a single admission paper—I believe there is a better way, but that is another story—if, in the endeavor to throw light upon our problem, a teacher in a secondary school were to set an admission paper embodying his views, would it differ materially from those set by the colleges?

It is, perhaps, impossible to answer that question categorically. Where uniform examinations are not adopted, the colleges differ among themselves in the character of their admission papers as widely as they would differ with the preparatory schools, were the latter privileged to submit such papers for approval. Moreover, I am not a chosen representative of the secondary schools. I believe I am in substantial accord with many of the English teachers in New England, but I do not wish to hold them responsible for my vagaries, and I speak only for myself in the suggestions which follow. I hope the ensuing discussion will throw a strong search-light upon any untenable doctrines, for I have no pride in believing an error—even of my own invention.

First, then, let us inquire, *Of what should a college admission paper in English be a test?*

The lowest test of all, in my opinion, we may term the mechanical. This examines a MS. for neatness; and as neatness begets accuracy, a neat examination book predisposes the examiner at once in favor of the candidate. Next it examines the book—perhaps half unconsciously—for crowding. If no word touches another upon the written page the rudest penmanship is generally legible, and the fantastic pot-hooks may serve, until closer inspection follows, to indicate character. Thus the candidate produces a second favorable impression. Then the

test goes on—if you will permit me to personify it—to scrutinize the spelling, the punctuation, and the division into paragraphs. Pardon me if I say, in passing, that I think undue emphasis is sometimes laid upon these very desirable accomplishments. Their acquirement will not make a man cultured, or their non-acquirement necessarily render him illiterate. Yet I am persuaded that if Chaucer, or Will Shakespeare, or Milton were to knock unheralded at the doors of some colleges, and submit autograph copies of their choicest unpublished lucubrations to prove that, after training, they could write with edification—I am persuaded that they would all be turned back till they could spell better than Geoff., write better than Will, and punctuate better than John.

I remember seeing a MS. by James T. Fields that was sent up to the printer, and the only punctuation marks in the whole article were dashes. They did duty as commas, semicolons, periods, and what not. The printer was made silent partner with plenipotentiary powers, and no doubt satisfied the author. It is an undeniable fact that we may, without reproach, hire men and women by the day to spell for us, to punctuate for us, and to paragraph for us. But only charlatans hire others to do their thinking.

One of our New England colleges prints upon its papers the solemn declaration that no candidate whose work is seriously defective in spelling, or punctuation, or division into paragraphs, will be given a certificate in English. It seems to assume that if he offend in one point he is guilty of all. It is consistent too. I, having suffered, compassionate the distressed. Last summer it refused a certificate to one of my best writers because he spelled like a gentleman, and not like a scholar. I went to investigate. Before his book was found I said to Professor —, “I predict that in choice of words, correct syntax, logical order, and clearness of thought and expression, he was above the average. But his spelling is poor.” The diagnosis written on the book-cover confirmed my prognosis in a surprising manner and almost word for word. He was rejected on spelling alone. Inferior writers but better spellers received C and D.

Now I consider that, the placing of undue emphasis on a mechanical test. How do you know whether this paper is spelled, punctuated, and paragraphed as it should be? You may criticise or even condemn it; but you will consider only what meets the ear, and if I have sinned grievously in my manuscript the printer will throw his typographical mantle over me and you will never know.

There is a higher test than the mechanical, which we may call the scholarly. This seeks to know whether the candidate has read with intelligence and care the books assigned, and whether he can discuss portions of them with ready and accurate expression. In other words, it is a test in composition, with subject-matter supplied from the body of literature which has been read.

But the highest test of all yet remains: this I shall call the literary test.

I am well aware that some colleges look with disfavor upon any attempt to teach literature in the secondary school. But I cannot believe that they are in the majority, otherwise why do they assign us literature to read? Why do we waste our time over the *Merchant of Venice*, which contains more poetry than fact? Why are we given *Lycidas* as a book for "special study?" Is it that we may familiarize ourselves with the biography of Edward King, or that we may puzzle our brains over that exquisite anatomical paradox—*blind mouths?* or discuss the fabled "fable of Bellerus old?" If that be the object, or if *Lycidas* be treated by teacher or studied by pupil as if that were the object, the results will be dismal. A young man wrote me within a week, saying, in substance:

"I read Milton's Minor Poems last year, while preparing for college, and thought them stupid. A few nights since I picked up *Lycidas* by accident and found it charming."

And his explanation was both philosophical and literary:

"In the first place, I suppose, I did not enjoy it because

Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear

forced it upon me."

I am fain to believe that those who assigned works in litera-

ture as a basis for composition, did so with the expectation that such books would be appreciated and enjoyed. Is it too much to suppose boys and girls yet in the secondary school capable of appreciating literature? Nay, is it absurd to imagine that here and there, as years roll on, may be found some schoolboy or schoolgirl who shall create literature? And ought not examining boards to look with patient, if amused, toleration upon their crude yet legitimate attempts? Whenever I felt inclined to judge harshly my little girl as she stumbled or hesitated over long words in learning how to read, I used to apply a corrective to myself by trying to read a new language in a strange character. Such an attempt was often no less humiliating than instructive. In like manner, if the college examiner—who is not always on the faculty, or even an expert, but often a paid neophyte with sympathies less tender than his years—if this examiner should submit himself to the same stressful conditions as those under which his victim writhes, he might be surprised to discover that even the product of his own practiced pen would not be literature. Not every scholar can turn off a *Rasselas* at a sitting.

Within forty-eight hours a memorandum has fallen into my hands concerning the examination of a certain boy at a certain college. The boy failed to pass, and his teacher sought and secured permission to see the book that was rejected. One of the themes assigned was, "Priam goes to Achilles to recover Hector's body;" an excellent topic, giving to a student who had read the *Iliad* an opportunity to show his knowledge of the subject, and to exhibit his skill in narration, description, or invention. One sentence written by the candidate ran as follows: "His white hair hangs about his aged face, and touches the purple and gems of his robe." Such a passage is not above criticism, but what is its fault? Will each of you kindly decide for himself how he would characterize it? . . . The examiner marked it "drool!" a term that seems to me to have been fished up from some puddle on the college campus rather than drawn from wells of English undefiled; and with this apparently favorite, but somewhat overworked, epithet the examiner stigmatized several similar passages.

The teacher says: "There were two or three misspelled words, and two or three sentences marked 'atrocious,' when the boy in his zeal for his subject had thought and written too rapidly—the words tumbling over each other."

Now I speak quite impersonally; for I know neither the college, nor the boy, nor the teacher, of whom I have spoken. I am not informed whether it was a New England college. I am also willing to concede that the passages that were crowded and misspelled may have presented to the eye of a scholar a truly "atrocious" appearance. But I submit that it was rather severe to mark such a mild flight of the imagination as "His white hair falls about his aged face and touches the purple and gems of his robe," as *drool*. The boy did not say *His snowy hair falls about his wrinkled face*; or, *His wintry locks conceal his furrowed features*. He not only did not reach the depths of depravity in expression, but it is difficult to see how, if he tried to paint the scene at all, he could have done so with more quiet color, unless he had said, *His hair falls about his face*; and that would be so bald he might as well have had no hair at all.

The question here arises, Should we clip the wings of a young writer every time he attempts to soar? If such a passage as

"You cataracts and hurricanoes spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks! . . .
Singe my white head! and thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity of the world!"—

if such a passage as this arouses no invidious comment when written by a master of literature, why should we deny a novice the privilege of saying "white hair" and "aged face?" Note, also, that this "drooling" boy uses color true to Homer's description, that his grammar is perfect, and that not a word in the passage is misspelled.

We are taught not to despise the day of small things, and it is not always wisdom to disdain young things. What has been may be. We do not forget the precocious Chatterton, who literally misspelled his way into fame, concocting his astonishing forgeries in the old muniment room at Bristol and dying at eighteen. We remember our own virile Bryant, who produced

his masterpiece at about the age when Chatterton closed his sad career; and though by reason of strength the great American lived till his "white hair" swept his "aged face" at fourscore and four and wrote excellent poetry all adown the Flood of Years, he reached high-water mark in his maiden effort. Accordingly, I believe firmly that some questions should be framed looking to a higher test than either the mechanical or the scholarly; that the literary realm should not be neglected. I believe that even glaring deficiencies in one of these realms ought not to exclude a candidate, provided he appears qualified in the other two. I consider such a candidate a person of promise, and college education, as I conceive it, is designed still further to cultivate promising men and women. *A fortiori* I maintain that in those rare cases where a candidate proves himself both scholarly and literary, but sadly needs to perfect his mechanism of expression, that he should not be cast into outer darkness, while those who can write perfect platitudes, or tell the *whole* story of Cambuscan bold, or spell Chautauqua correctly, are given an honorable seat at the Banquet of the Learned.

Have I wandered from my theme? Doubtless, if you call me to account geometrically. I have not come by an air line; but you will be glad to learn that I have reached my second and final point: *What sorts of questions give suitable tests in the respective realms that I have mentioned?*

The mechanical realm need not delay us long. No knowledge of literature is needed here. The dean of a New England college once told me that he would readily consent to have no formal examination in English if he were allowed to mark the books of applicants in German, Latin, Geometry, and Chemistry with regard to their mother tongue. That position is surely consistent with the idea that English literature, as a study, ought to be deferred until the candidate reaches college; but it seems to me that some topic from experience, such as, *Sketch your career at the fitting school*, would furnish a fairer test. Still, any question that will call forth a short paragraph in reply, will suffice for the mechanical test.

In the scholarly realm, so long as present conditions prevail,

the college examiner wishes to know, presumably, whether the assigned books have been read. Then first of all it should seem wise to set questions which anybody could answer in some fashion—if he had read the assigned works as indicated—and which nobody could answer by guesswork. These answers could be examined carefully with a view also to grammar and the elements of rhetoric; such as, choice of words, unity, logic, and precision. As my paper calls for “practical illustrations,” I submit a few questions based on the books to be read this year, and designed to discover, primarily, whether the required reading has been done.

1. Which of the books for “study and practice” do you consider the greatest work? Did you enjoy it most?

2. Which of the books for “reading and practice” did you enjoy most? Give your reasons.

3. Quote ten consecutive lines from each of two poems read by you in preparation for college. State how you came to know these especial lines.

4. Write any interesting incident from *Ivanhoe*, in from 200 to 300 words.

5. Describe briefly the following characters, devoting not more than three lines to each: Shylock, Brutus, Will Wimble, Mrs. Primrose, Death-in-Life, Rowena, King Gama, Godfrey Cass, and Banquo.

Besides questions like the above, I would have, even in the scholarly realm, topics dealing with personal experience. Compositions on such topics could be examined for mechanism, for grammar, and for simple rhetoric. But I would *not* have questions in grammar, philology, or dry detail set upon any book in the assigned list. The very thought that a book in English must be so prepared is enough to give the pupil a cordial hatred for the work; a hatred which, if not philosophical, is psychological, for there are more things in school and college, ladies and gentlemen, than are dreamt of in our psychologies.

Finally we come to the literary realm. If we agree to examine in this, what questions are suitable?

Speaking broadly, I should say they must be questions testing appreciation and genius on the part of the applicant—remem-

bering, however, that appreciation does not necessarily imply ability to write literature; one faculty is merely critical, the other creative.

I do not underrate the difficulty of setting an examination in literature. Some admirable teachers say it cannot be done. No man has succeeded in extracting sunshine from cucumbers, though it is doubtless there; and if our chemistry were sufficiently refined, cucumbers might come to take the place of coal. He would be a genius, indeed, who could discriminate, without similes, between salt, sour, and bitter, or could describe intelligently—so that he that ran might smell—between the odor of white rose and heliotrope. Some concrete facts cannot be put into words. “Better imagined than described” tells only half the truth concerning them. As the greatest forces are the invisible—air, steam, electricity, gravitation, spirit—so the greatest truths are the ineffable and refuse to be imprisoned in a catechism.

But admitting all these practical difficulties, there are some questions that may be asked, the intelligent answer to which shall show appreciation of taste, force, style, and quality; there are other questions which may elicit replies indicative of both critical and creative ability. Add to these, questions pertaining to wide reading, scholarly research, and special information. I submit a few as they occur to me. I do not offer them as models, but as suggestions:

1. Make a list of the English books which you have read in preparation for college, so far as you can recall them. Give the name (in full, if possible) of each author. In the case of each author, mention other books, poems, or articles by him; underscore those which you have read or with which you are familiar; tell in what century he lived; mention one or more of his literary contemporaries.

2. Prove that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* ought to be read together.

3. Show some improbabilities in the plot of the *Vicar of Wakefield*.

4. Write an original paper, in Addison's style, on Sir Roger and a Blind Beggar.

5. Contrast the *Ancient Mariner* and the *Princess*

6. Compare *Burke's Speech on Conciliation* with any other of Burke's speeches that you have read, or with any of Webster's.

I should like to see a set of questions in what I have styled the literary realm, on lines similar to these, inserted into every college admission paper in English. Let them be styled Honor Questions. Let them challenge our youth to climb higher, our teachers to leave the trodden ways. Let them be to the student as Pike's Peak, Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, and the Himalayas are to the mountain climber. Assume that only the literary pupil can answer any. Expect no one to answer all. But let proficiency and genius have their opportunity; encourage the zealous teacher to do better work and the ambitious student to take a broader view.

DISCUSSION.

PROFESSOR MARY A. JORDAN, of Smith College: The very excellence of the paper to which we have listened suggests some of the difficulties in setting a proper examination paper in English. Yet we feel convinced, I am sure, first, that all our college-entrance papers have met Professor Lowell's requirements; and, second, that all of our examiners have been constructive masters of English, appreciating the type of students that he sends up. Therefore there can be no question between Professor Lowell and us.

It is certainly to our credit that in the particulars in which we have ever erred we have been patient targets for his scorn. But as regards the specific question under discussion, it has not been rendered quite clear what an examination paper in English is to examine upon. We have been told of some things that should be avoided. But the question really is: What do the schools wish to offer, what do they think we ought to demand? How are the college examiners to come into relation with the trainers and to test the methods exemplified by students' papers? Practically, the first difficulty that I meet as an examiner is that in some schools examinations are discredited by the custom of excusing from final examinations students who secure either in term work or in intermediate tests a grade which makes the teacher sure of their proficiency. The result is that, if I put what Mr. Lowell calls an honor question in a paper, a student of this type is likely to suppose from simple unfamiliarity with examinations that an unfair require-

ment is made. It is difficult to render the examination process attractive or stimulating to students who have had little or no experience in it. Again and again it has been my experience that a candidate for entrance to college who supposed that she was what is called a prize student failed to pass satisfactory examinations in her chosen subjects because she had not learned how to be examined. This last fall a young man offered himself for examination at one of our universities. In school he had been uniformly excused from examination in his favorite study, on account of his high standing in it. He barely escaped a condition in that subject, greatly to the surprise of his trainers, greatly to the surprise of his parents, and somewhat to my amazement. But when I happened to read the answers that he had given to the questions on the paper I found that he had taken the tone of a person of whom all the commonplace matters would naturally be expected. He wrote a little treatise of a more or less original and creative sort, leaving out all the points which had ceased to interest him, but which he might have omitted from ignorance. I pointed out to him this fact. "But everybody knows those," he said. He had written what might be considered either a very clever paper, or a slightly impudent one. The examiners in this particular university gave him the benefit of the doubt and a low grade for his paper. The English examination under such circumstances often reveals something for which the candidate is not, therefore, responsible. In such cases there is a lack of balance, a lack of good judgment, a lack of academic taste, which might have been taught him, which perhaps it was expected would have been taught him, and which a series of definitely imposed examinations, with explanations from time to time of what they were intended to accomplish, and of the reasons for their special form, might have made thoroughly familiar to him. He might have been spared a feeling of surprised injustice at this result of his examination.

In the next place, I am inclined to think that the personal equation in examination counts for a good deal. It is extremely difficult to frame a paper in such a way as to meet the expectations or the plans of students. I frankly admit that after some twenty years of effort, I am still very ignorant of what the schools and trainers consider most important in their teaching or in our requirements. If I put one question, for instance, calling for originality in treatment and put it second in the list, it may frighten a timid student from a school where little demand for originality was made. On the other hand, if, as the second question, I put a simple demand for facts,

students who have received the other kind of training may exaggerate very much the emphasis attached to the facts. They look the paper over and see three or four things that they cannot answer, and they fall to wondering how far these failures are to count against them and the things they do know. This goes on indefinitely. In other words, the maker of the examination paper is not acquainted with his candidate; the candidate does not understand the make-up of the paper or the standards of marking. They are likely to overvalue marks anyway. They frequently find the freedom offered them under the expectation that it will be considered a privilege, vague and indefinite. It represents all the horrors of the unknown. Students say, "What did you want to have as the answer to that question?" and I have said, "Whatever you wanted to answer." But it was evident that my question had utterly failed in its aim. In other cases a paper has seemed too easy and has been despised. To a student having been used to a very exact, very precise, and very obviously adjusted set of questions, and meeting what appeared an unchartered freedom, the conclusion has been that the demand was not intended to be anything that a person could not answer without special preparation, and that therefore the school would fail of the credit due it for its fine and conscientious work. The difficulties of setting an examination paper in English are really the difficulties attaching to all examinations. What do we really think about examinations? In what spirit ought they to be offered by the school? How far is it possible to bring the students into a condition of sympathy and co-operation with the process? Students generally seem to feel that an examination paper is more or less of a catastrophe, something that should not be expected to be understood, and about which, like some of the mysteries of theology, it is wiser and more reverent not to inquire too closely. I remember setting a paper myself in the junior year in college, and the comment made by one of my bolder spirits in the paper handed in was: "Assuming this to be one of the well-known faculty jokes, the answer would be as follows." I respected the young woman's intrepidity; I was not sure that I altogether respected her judgment. It seemed to me that a little more careful and serious acceptance of a possible meaning, even on the part of a member of the faculty, might have led her to a conviction on the whole more edifying. Then, I am inclined to think that as far as examination papers are concerned, whether in college or in preparation for it, the relation of the emphasis of the training and the apparent emphasis of the paper is not only vague, but often almost

mysterious to the student. To a certain extent this is necessary. One of the purposes of examination is the training in self-possession. Those of you who have read "Kim" remember that he was a boy of considerable mental and other endowments and that he usually managed to impress the persons whom he met as being worth while, though unconventional. But in his experience the things that he fought against most fiercely were the ones that he turned to for support in the rare lapses of his very uncommon self-confidence. The opening stanzas of one of the chapters represent, I think very clearly, the spirit to which the process of education properly contributes. Whether the examination is to be the beginning or the end of the education, is a question open to debate. But examination may properly take for granted something done. There must be something in the candidate or his attainments to examine upon. Kim's morning verses overheard by the camel driver show plainly enough what he was prepared on :

Something I owe to the soil that grew —
More to the life that fed —
But most to Allah who gave me two
Separate sides to my head.
I would go without shirts or shoes,
Friends, tobacco, or bread,
Sooner than for an instant lose
Either side of my head.

But few students come to us in a similar spirit of intelligent self-assertion. I am inclined to think that if they did we might consider them mature enough for graduation.

But even this is not all that goes to make a satisfactory examination paper. There are besides the moral quality suggested already, information and skill in presenting it. For this reason it seems, on the whole, quite fair, that the type of paper which sets distinct difficulties should at least be tolerated by the student and by the student's trainer. It ought to be remembered besides that difficulties do not appeal equally to all persons; what is an effort to one person is pleasurable expression to another. Any means of lessening unreasonable strain from uncertainty or the fear of injustice is earnestly desired by good teachers. But good teachers differ about what should be considered unreasonable. Time ought to be allowed for students to collect their wits, and certain types of failure should be met by full permission to try again. And yet, as long as it is true that the power to do a thing at once and when called upon is one of the purposes for setting an examination at

all, a first failure is to that extent a failure in this power, and the candidate ought to have fortitude and intrepidity enough to meet the truth, even though he may partly recover himself later.

To return to Kim. When he met the jeweler who handled men who were broken and jewels that needed mending, he was really being tested for his fitness to enter upon what his intrepid young soul had already chosen as his aim in life—to play in the great game and have a price on his head. Kim was already well along, though, for he had elected to endure hardness. Too many prefer to live easily. At seventeen or eighteen they talk of “me” and “my temperament;” they talk of “me” and “what I can do best;” they talk of “me” as if they were now complete, instead of being, like Adam in the old play, crossing the stage to get created. But to whatever applied the test is the same to Kim as to the others. He was placed in extraordinary, and to him probably disconcerting, conditions. There were gods and idols, incense, men and machines unlike those he had known, although he considered himself ordinarily a competent and experienced person. His self-confidence was attacked at as many and as vital points as possible. First he was shown the untrustworthiness of his senses. Then he was subjected to the influence of a powerful will, helped by hypnotic skill. Illusions which had succeeded uniformly with other men and boys, Kim resisted by the involuntary device of steadying his mind by repeating the 7’s and 8’s in the English multiplication table. Kim had not loved the English multiplication table and he had not consented to spend his time on it with this end in view. He had learned it because it was part of the mysterious scheme of things which was to introduce him to the great game and the delicious excitement of living with a price on his head. Something of this mystery and temporary discomfort is in the nature of the end involved. Kim, for all his oriental resourcefulness, could not escape it, nor can we. His teachers were too wise to try. They trained him to meet difficulty and then looked for facts to justify their preparation, even from unexpected sources. But the strenuous life has its charms fortunately, since we cannot entirely elude it, if we would. Teachers and students, by the papers we write and the papers we set we are tested, and from end to end of life and thought we play the great game with a price on our heads. And it will be found that facts well and thoroughly learned are a good point of departure for the student and for the English paper. Precision and skill in presenting them, force and some originality in relating them, are desirable qualities, which it is not

unreasonable to expect that an English paper should display, as do other practical interests of the student's life.

MR. JAMES W. MACDONALD, agent of the Massachusetts Board of Education: I assure you I appreciate the compliment which you have paid me in inviting me to discuss this question before you. I shall endeavor, so far as time is concerned, not to abuse your courtesy; so far as the sentiments which I may express are concerned, I am not quite so sure. I think it may be as Professor Dolbear, of Tufts, once said to me on accepting an invitation which I had extended to him to speak at a teachers' institute: "When you hear what I have to say, you may wish I had died in infancy."

The meaning of the phrase "instruction in English," seems to be confined, in discussions of courses of study and college examinations, first, to instruction in English literature, with a view to cultivating appreciation, and, second, to instruction in grammar, rhetoric, and composition, with a view to cultivating the power of expression. It seems to be overlooked generally that almost all the other branches taught in the high school and college are conducted in English, and that other subjects furnish even superior opportunities for training in the mother-tongue. I have a friend who took a brief course in music, not because he was musical, for he was not, but he said he did it to get a knowledge of the language used in musical discussions, so that he might be able to read an article on music intelligently. He did the same with other things, with art for example—brief, chippy courses, non-intensive courses (a wicked thing to do, I know); but he believed that he gained his purpose more directly and that it was the shortest cut to a knowledge of the English language and a command of it.

Furthermore, by the term "English literature" we mean that great department of English works which De Quincy has aptly called the literature of power, because its function is simply to move our feelings, to stir our emotions, and, as De Quincy argues, not to teach anything. According to De Quincy—and I fully agree with him—the purpose of *King Lear* was not to teach history, philosophy, or any other thing; it was simply to shake us to the very depths of our souls, to stir us with feelings of pity for an old man, even though he brought his sufferings upon himself; to fill us with indignation at filial ingratitude, even though it was deserved; and to move us with admiration for filial affection under circumstances that made it heroic. I say, the object

of Shakespeare in *King Lear* was to stir us in that way to our depths; and when *King Lear* has done that for us, it has done all that it can do. The story, the incidents in *King Lear*, are the means by which we are moved. It would be a good thing if we could be so moved without them; it would be a great gain if we could be moved and have our hearts stirred in that way, and be left better, as we always are when we have been so stirred, without the agency of events, stories, or literature; without reading *King Lear* for example; but we cannot; our feelings have to be moved in this way. So by the story of *King Lear* Shakespeare reaches us. But the one grand thing—the one thing that is of value in *King Lear*—is the fact that it moves us and leaves us better, holier men and women as the result.

In literature, then, the one thing for the reader to do, if I am right—and I probably am not; my acquaintance with myself leads me to confess that I am wrong about half the time—if I am right, the one thing for the reader of literature to do is to read and surrender himself to the influence of his author without any distracting or disturbing considerations.

Now, my principal charge against college examinations is not that they overburden the mind with details that are of little or no value; not that they impose an immense amount of work and take time that can be more profitably employed; but it is that these examinations do interpose distracting and disturbing considerations between the mind of the pupil and the influence of the author; close up, as it were, the feelings of the reader to the thing he is reading, and, by keeping him thinking of the skeleton, prevents him from perceiving the life and spirit. It is like working a valuable mineral, not for the gold that is in it, but for the dross.

Let me illustrate. I have some of the college examinations in English before me. These are some of the questions: Give the character of Palamon; the character of Arcite; character of the Vicar of Wakefield. Tell the story of the *Merchant of Venice*. Tell the story of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and so on.

What are all these things but distracting and disturbing considerations between the pupil and his author? But you will ask: Are not these things good? Ought not a pupil to learn and be able to tell the story of what he has read?

If you are reading a book on science, question your author, doubt him, analyze his statements, put him to the test, compel him to prove his points, criticise him severely, if you please. This is your right

with an author who assumes to teach; but in reading literature, it is not so. The one test is: Does he move, delight, or interest me? In reading history, one of the principal things is to get the details—certain events, certain dates, that need to be remembered; in studying science, there are certain things we need to fix in the memory—certain compositions, certain formulæ, for example; but in reading literature, to me it is one of the beautiful privileges that I can forget the details of what I have read, that has moved me, and after a period of forgetting can take up the book and re-read it with something of the old emotions stirring within me. But when I have taken a literary production and have memorized its facts and incidents—have learned it as I would the driest side of history, that is, as a succession of events—the old feeling and emotion can never be aroused again by reading that work. You may differ from me in that respect; I am stating my experience. Literature is not history, it is not written to be remembered as a series of details. Think, for instance, of reading the murder scene in *Othello*, in which Othello enters the room lighted by a dim taper, where Desdemona is sleeping on a couch, and says: "Put out the light and then—put out the light;" think of reading this passage and what follows it, with one part of your mind bent on determining whether or not Othello has made a good choice of words, another part trying to settle upon what figure of speech was used, and another part trying to memorize and fix the exact sequence of incidents! Think of reading any good literature with the mind preoccupied with all these distracting details, and at the same time overshadowed and depressed with the overwhelming consciousness that after the feast has been partaken of there will be an examination emetic administered for the purpose of getting it back. Tell me, is that the way to read? Are we not bringing into our literature-teaching methods that belong to other branches? The aim in all this is always affirmed to be the cultivation of an appreciation of literature. The attempt to cultivate an appreciation of literature in this way must fail from the nature of the literature itself, and that it does fail can be shown by a large number of cases.

First, what is literature? Literature is the output of thoughts that spring from all the knowledge of things that the author possesses. It is the attempt to express this knowledge in some attractive form. It might be said that literature is the correlation of all other knowledge, or perhaps the blossoming out of all other knowledge. It draws its illustration from history, from art, from science, from mathematics,

from human nature. It is not reading literature alone that is the best preparation for the appreciation of literature; it is the acquisition of other knowledge, a broad, general groundwork of information, that will give the equipment to interpret literature for one's self. Do you want to learn to like Emerson? Begin by studying modern philosophy and science; particularly the theory of motion, heat, electricity, light, and of the formation and evolution of the world and the race. Do you want to learn to like Browning? Begin, not by studying Browning, but with psychology and human nature. I say literature needs for its interpretation a broad knowledge; the broader and profounder the better, in short. Therefore the teacher who is teaching history, the teacher who is teaching art, the teacher who is teaching science, the teacher who is teaching any kind of knowledge, and giving the pupils clear fundamental ideas therein, is doing more to enable the pupil to interpret literature, and is laying for that pupil a better foundation for the appreciation of literature, than the one who is teaching literature itself.

I once read to a friend of mine, a college graduate, by the way, the first two stanzas of Emerson's "Song of Nature," and asked him what he thought of them. He asked me to read them again, which I did:

Mine are the night and morning,
The pits of air, the gulf of space,
The sportive sun, the gibbous moon,
The innumerable days.

I hide in the solar glory,
I am dumb in the pealing song,
I rest on the pitch of the torrent,
In slumber I am strong.

He meditated for a few moments after I had finished, and then remarked: "That sounds to me like utter nonsense." His lack of appreciation of the poetic beauty and meaning of the stanzas was due to his lack of the necessary interpreting knowledge of science. I hold, our reading depends largely on our knowledge. Appreciative readers of good literature came out of the old-time school and college before literature was taught in them at all.

I have said that many cases could be cited to show that the method of teaching literature which I am censuring fails of its purpose. I shall give but one.

I have of late been thrown into the company of a number of young

women at different times; some of whom were college graduates, some now in college, one of these in a New England college that prides itself on its strong course in literature. I heard those young women talk about the books they were reading. And what were these books, do you think, those that they all had read in the college requirements? Not a bit of it. I do not remember the names of many of the books they were reading, for they were unfamiliar to me; but one of them was *A Fair Pagan of the Alleghanies*.

One of these young women, to my knowledge, had read two or three of Scott's novels before entering the high school, but after reading *Ivanhoe* in the college requirements seemed to have lost her taste for him. None of them, with one exception, had read any of Shakespeare except the college requirements. There was manifestly a shrinking on their part from the literature that they had so minutely dissected and studied with a view to the college examinations.

I have been present at recitations where the preparation for college examinations in English was going on. There would be a few—four or five, perhaps more—in the class that would show some interest, but by far the greater part of the class was apparently uninterested and irresponsive to the method of treatment. There are always in a class a few pupils whose flexible, ductile, malleable minds can be made to do anything. If you named the telegraph poles from New Haven to New York, and set them to memorizing the names, they would do it with a show of interest.

To illustrate the character of some of the instruction for college examinations, permit me to relate what I heard in a class that was at work on the *Ancient Mariner*. A girl was called up and proceeded thus: "There was a mariner, and he met three men, and he stopped them, and they wanted him to let them go, but he wouldn't; he held them and he said a ship sailed out of the harbor—. "Here the teacher pulled her up abruptly, saying: "You have left out something." The girl tried to recall what she had left out in the narrative, and going back, started again. She could not, however, and none of the class could remember what was missing. Finally the teacher told her that she had "forgotten to say that the wedding guest sat down on a stone." Another teacher was doing *Macbeth* in that same way. When I asked her what her object was, she explained that there were two scholars in the class that were thinking of going to college, and so she had to teach with a view to getting them ready for the college examinations.

You will say that the college does not want this kind of work; that

this is to misapprehend the purposes of the college. I grant it. I do not accuse you college people of having so bad a purpose; not at all. I know you are too intelligent to approve any such work; but I say it is the inevitable result of the examinations you set. They divert the mind of both teacher and pupil from that which is best and noblest in literature into these narrow channels. It is not altogether what your questions are, but as the teachers do not know where the questions are going to fall, they go into all these petty details. They were, in this instance, studying *Macbeth* as we used to study history when it consisted of learning a series of events in their order, and reciting them. If anyone will visit a class in English literature that is fitting for the college examinations—not all classes, I should say, because there are many exceptions—but if anyone will visit most of such classes and can distinguish between the results of the methods of instruction that are employed there and the training the pupils would be getting if they were reciting simply the details of history, he would be sharper than I am. But I must not dwell longer on this phase of the discussion.

As to the other phase of teaching English, I shall speak briefly. The object is to train pupils to write essays in good English, of course, and the subjects are mostly drawn from the required literature. This makes it still worse for the literature, as it emphasizes attention to what can be retold. But that is not the worst of it.

A person writes well only when he is writing from an impulse from within; when he is writing thoughts of his own thinking that are calling for expression; not when he is writing thoughts that are extorted from him by outside pressure. To force a pupil to write something on a subject for which he is crudely and mechanically prepared, is to do violence to the training of that pupil in thinking and in expression. Here, for instance, I find in one of these examination papers this question: "The Character of Humor as shown in the *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*." To answer that question one should have read almost everything humorous written during the last two centuries, to get a setting for his exposition; he should have had the *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers* before him as he wrote, and he should have had at least a week if not a month to do it in. What will the pupil do with such a question? I have asked a number of pupils who have taken college examinations this question, and most of them testified that they tried to recall what their teacher "had told them about it." What were the probable facts in the case just cited? Undoubtedly

some officious fellow had written a disquisition on humor in the *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers* as if readers of the *Spectator* were likely to overlook it, and the chances are he had spoiled the naïveté of it; the teacher had hashed this over for his pupils, and now the pupils are rehashing it at an examination, each step a deterioration from its predecessor; the result, a mixture of what the critics and the teacher said, with nothing of the pupils own individuality or spontaneity; nothing from within, wholly from without. Violence, I claim, is thus done to the pupil's individuality.

I do not want to abuse your patience; I should like to talk longer upon this feature of the theme. I am not a prophet, but it does not require a prophet to foresee that, if this present method of teaching English is continued in the secondary school, and in the college, New England has seen her last great literary man or woman. In my opinion this is not the way to make literary men and women.

Here is one more question to which I want to call your attention: "Describe Lowell's treatment of the Holy Grail in the *Vision of Sir Launfal*." Pupils from the high school entering college are asked to answer this question. I challenge any college professor of English to write an essay on this topic. I will not confine him to an hour. I will let him have Lowell's *Vision of Sir Launfal* before him as he writes and will give him a week or a month, or two months, only I want him to send the essay to me and let me criticise it.

Again, the instruction in rhetoric and composition is mainly a set of rules, some of them good, but many of them artificial and hampering; and this is done in defiance of the historical fact that every great writer that we have has made himself great in defiance of the set rules of his time, like those we are teaching with so much pains and so much emphasis, thus repressing individuality and spontaneity.

Emerson says, speaking of the poet:

Great is the art,
Great be the manners of the bard.
He shall not his brain encumber
With the coil of rhyth and number,
But leaving rule and pale forethought
He shall aye climb
For his rhyme.

Emerson is right. History, I repeat, teaches us that every great writer has made himself great in defiance of rules? Shakespeare defied all the rules of his time in his writings. Ben Jonson wrote by

rule; but who reads Ben Jonson? (And for that matter it is not long that anybody will read Shakespeare, unless we can rescue him from the college requirements.) We find every great writer was a rule-smasher. I know that the purpose of the college is good, but good purposes often adopt bad means. Let me recall a little history. There was a time when Latin was a living language and was so taught. It became a college requirement, and college examinations were based largely upon Latin, hence the features of the language that lent themselves most readily to examinations came to be emphasized. Latin almost ceased to be taught as a language, but instead as a piece of linguistic mechanism. It became a dead language, but it was not a natural death, it was a murder. We are still learning a lot *about* Latin, but very little anywhere are we studying Latin *as a language*.

A similar tendency today, as a result of college examinations, is going on in English literature and in English composition. The tendency is to place emphasis upon the wrong things, and if it continues it will be in my opinion the death of literary attainment in New England.

I have a great reverence for college professors; we all have. We love you, we honor you, we respect your great wisdom. We feel toward you something as Eugene Field represents one of his characters as feeling toward Dana of the New York *Sun*: "The sum of human knowledge wasn't half what Dana knew." We are ready to bow down before you so low (to use the language of an Irish friend of mine) that the ends of our noses will make footprints on the ground. We beseech you, however, to be careful not to misuse this reverence, not to misdirect our teaching.

The college professor has had an awakening of late. He has come out from his seclusion; he wants to take a hand in the world and in the movements of education. The movement had begun some half a century before he awoke, but at last he felt a stirring within. It was a noble desire on his part to want to take a hand in educational reform, but he didn't like to exert his energies where he could see no results; he did not like to spend his efforts in trying to move the immovable. So, instead of reforming the methods of instruction in colleges themselves, he undertook to tell the secondary teachers how to do their work. We would beseech you, college professors, to use your power over us wisely, so that it may help us to a fuller life rather than to an early death. We realize, and hope you realize, that your authority is so great over the public mind that an error, supported by *one* of you, *has*

more go and more spread to it than the truth supported by *twenty* or *thirty* of us underlings. Please remember this, and again I entreat you, use your wisdom wisely, and do not lead us in the wrong direction.

[The articles by Mr. Hadley, Mr. Tyler, Mr. Lowell, Miss Jordan, Mr. Jacobs, and Mr. MacDonald are reports of addresses given by them at the annual meeting of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of New England. The report of this association has been the feature of the December number of this journal for the past ten years and is looked for by our readers. We regret that lack of space prevents us from inserting the remainder of the discussions, but the annual volume may be obtained in a few weeks from the secretary, Mr. Ray Greene Huling, Cambridge, Mass.—EDITOR.]